

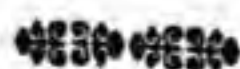
**A BRIEF ACCOUNT
OF THE
BRAHMO SAMAJ**

Adapted from "A Brief Account of the Brahmo Samaj
or the Hindu Church of the Divine Unity" by
Bipin Chandra Pal, 1900.

BRAHMO SAMAJ—THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

*Subishalamidam vishyam pabitram Brahma mandiram,
Chetah sunirmalam tirtham, Satyam shastram anashwaram.
Vishvaso dharmamulam hi, Priti parama sadhanam.
Swarthanashastu vairagyam, Brahmaireba prakirtate.*

This wide universe is the sacred temple of Brahman or the Supreme Being. The pure heart is the only place of pilgrimage. Truth is the one eternal Scripture. Faith is the foundation of religion, Love the highest discipline. Sacrifice of all self-regarding interests and desires is the only form of ascetic renunciation recognised and proclaimed by the members of the Brahmo Samaj.



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Brahman is Sanskrit for the Supreme Being, the author and governor of the Universe. The worshippers of this Supreme Being are Brahmos, and Samaj means congregation or church. Brahmo Samaj thus means a congregation of the worshippers of the Supreme Being.

Affirmations

The Brahmo Samaj believes in : (a) the existence and personality of God ; (b) the immortality of the human soul ; (c) the duty and efficacy of divine worship : (d) the continual self-revelation of God through nature, through the spirit of man, and the collective experiences of humanity : and (e) the eternal progress of the human soul.

Negations

The Brahmo Samaj does not believe in : (a) any supernatural revelation : (b) any particular book or collection of books as the one infallible revelation of divine truth, love, or law, and as the absolute and final authority and standard concerning human duty :

(c) any human being as a special or specific incarnation of the Deity, who is the full and final revelation of His word or idea ; (d) any prophet or saint or teacher as absolutely infallible, or as the one only guide to God, or the one only way of salvation.

Scriptures and Teachers

The Brahmo Samaj accepts, respects, and uses : (i) the scriptures, of the world, not as infallible or supernatural revelations, but as ancient records of the moral and spiritual experiences of the race, and as such, essential and exceedingly helpful to the spiritual life and progress of man; and (ii) it honours all true prophets and teachers of humanity, not as specific incarnations or mediators, but as manifestations (within the necessary limitations of finitude and the accidental limitations of their own time and race) of the nature of God, in whose image and out of whose substance humanity is created ; these prophets and teachers are revelations of the possibilities of humanity ; and therefore they are supremely helpful to men by the strength and inspiration of their life and character.

Teachings

The Brahmo Samaj preaches and proclaims : (i) the absolute unity and spiritual nature of God ; (ii) the perpetual presence and working in man of God, who as the True is at once the root and realisation of man's intellectual life, as the Good is both the norm and the form of his moral life, and as the Beautiful is as much the

source as the satisfaction of his aesthetic life ; (iii) the harmony of all scriptures and all prophets : (iv) the reconciliation of reason and faith, authority and independence, universalism and nationalism ; (v) the divine right of every man and woman to the free and unrestricted use and enjoyment of all their gifts and powers, to the good of themselves, the advancement of the race, and the glory of God,—a right which is absolutely inalienable and inviolable by any authority, whether it be priest, sovereign, or society.

Union with God

The Brahmo Samaj looks upon Union with God, intellectually through truth, morally through goodness, and emotionally through love and beauty, and practically through the furtherance of the universal well-being, as the highest aim of human life. To be so united with God and live in a perpetual consciousness of the Divine Presence is what we understand by Heaven, which is neither a state of absorption in God, nor a condition of mere rest and enjoyment, but of unbroken and eternal progress in truth, goodness, and love. Freedom from sin, that is from the desire or habit of following self or sense in any matter where it comes in conflict with the rights or the good of others or the need of Spirit, is salvation, and this is an absolute pre-condition of the attainment of eternal progress which is the destiny of the human soul.

Worship

Divine worship, which means to love God and to do such things as are acceptable and pleasing to Him, is the only method of attaining salvation that the Brahmo Samaj accepts as essential and valid.

The elements of divine worship, according to the liturgy of the Brahmo Samaj, are four, namely: (1) Awakening, which means inducing the right attitude of worship by arousing the mind to a sense of the Divine Presence by hymns, prayers, readings from the Scriptures, or, in public worship, by the exhortation of the minister: (2) Adoration, which means devoutly dwelling upon the various attributes of God, and remembering His love and mercy and goodness as revealed in our own lives, and in the general history of the race: (3) Communion, which means a vivid realisation of God in the depths of our own consciousness, and (4) Prayer.

Prayers

The following are free translations of some prayers incorporated in the liturgy of the Brahmo Samaj from the ancient Hindu scriptures—

Thou art our Father, like a Father do
Thou teach us wisdom. Forsake us not, O
Father, let us not be led into destruction.

O Lord, O Father, forgive us our sins
and our ignorance, and inspire us only with
what is good.

From untruth lead us to truth, from darkness and ignorance lead us to light and knowledge ; from death lead us to life eternal. O Thou Self-Revealer, do Thou reveal Thyself to us. Most Merciful Father, Keep us in the infinitude of Thy mercies now and for ever.

History of the Brahmo Samaj

Theologically and spiritually the Brahmo Samaj movement is connected with the earliest protestant movements in Hinduism, which commenced centuries before the Christian era in the earliest speculations and teachings of the Upanishads and the Vedanta, of which it is the latest and the most modern phase ; and as such it is necessarily a correction and development, adding to religion what is lacked in the past, namely, the ideal of a kingdom of God on earth, with its social and humanitarian corollaries. The present organisation, however, dates its birth from the year 1828, when the Calcutta Brahmo Samaj was founded by Raja Rammohun Roy (1774-1833), who was followed in its leadership by Maharshi Devendranath Tagore (1817-1905), Keshub Chandra Sen (1838-1884), Sivanath Sastri (1847-1919) and others.

Social Reform and Education

The Brahmo Samaj is not only a religious movement but is also a social reform movement in India. It has declared war against the institution of Hindu

caste, a system which to a large extent has neutralised and nullified the grand teachings of the Indian sages, who proclaimed the divinity of man. It has also broken through the barriers of the Zenana, which was imposed upon India by her Moslem rulers. It has raised its protest against the beneful institution of child-marriage, and has removed the disability under which Hindu widows laboured in the matter of re-marriage. It has taken the lead in promoting female education, and owns Schools, Colleges and Industrial Training Institutes for women, in addition to many educational institutions, Schools and Colleges for males. It runs several Orphanages, Residential Houses for destitute women, Charitable Dispensaries and similar Social Welfare organisations. It publishes about a dozen periodicals and newspapers, printed in English and in different Indian Languages. There are upwords of one hundred congregations in different parts of India. Its members are prominently associated with every public movement in India that has for its object the moral, social or political amelioration of the people.